

Fifth Army assists in relief efforts in hurricane's aftermath

Press Release

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Posted Sep 08, 2005 at 1:37:PM MDT

FORT SAM HOUSTON, Texas ? Fifth U.S. Army joined thousands of Defense Department personnel in relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Even as the hurricane struck Aug. 29, Fifth Army established a lifeline in Louisiana, one of the 21 states within the unit's area of responsibility for training and mobilization.

Lt. Gen. Robert T. Clark, the Fifth Army commanding general, in response to a request from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, sent a defense coordinating officer into the area. Col. Anthony Daskevich, the commander of Headquarters, 4th Brigade, 75th Division (Training Support) at Fort Sill, Okla., established a forward element while the winds were still raging through the southeast.

The DCO is the military liaison with FEMA to coordinate military support in the event of a man-made or natural disaster. The military works with FEMA to reduce the loss of life, mitigate damage, and provide life support.

Since the hurricane, Fifth Army has provided about 70 people directly on the scene and 100 more at its headquarters in Fort Sam Houston's historic quadrangle to help with the relief and recovery efforts.

The U.S. Northern Command in Colorado established Joint Task Force – Katrina to support FEMA. The First U.S. Army took charge of the JTF, which has in its arsenal a myriad of military assets, and operates out of Camp Shelby, Miss. Since the establishment of the JTF, Fifth Army supported efforts across the spectrum.

Most dramatically, Brig. Gen. Mark A. Graham, the newly installed Fifth U.S. Army deputy commanding general, and a handful from the unit, led the military contingent's portion in the evacuation of the Superdome. Soldiers from Fifth Army joined the Louisiana National Guard, the Air National Guard, Coast Guard, and local officials in evacuating nearly 63,000 from New Orleans.

A second contingent, led by Col. John A. Simpson, deployed to Baton Rouge to assist the defense coordinating officer. A third contingent left Sept. 2 to re-supply the teams in Baton Rouge and provide much-needed vehicles to get around the devastated areas.

"Anytime you get to help people in a situation as tragic as this, any little thing you can do to help, gives me a lot of joy," said Maj. Renaldo Parker, a medical operations officer for Fifth Army, serving as a staff medical advisor in Baton Rouge. "What the people of New Orleans are going through is unimaginable."

As the situation developed, Fifth Army Soldiers and civilian employees worked to move military assets into the region and evacuees out. With the vast majority of the people out of the greater-New Orleans area, attention turned to the surrounding states providing humanitarian assistance to those displaced in a multi-state area, predominately in Texas. To handle the evacuee issues, the Fifth Army established defense coordinating elements in Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Arkansas to assist in dealing with the issues.

Command Sgt. Major George Nieves, the top noncommissioned officer in Fifth Army, was among senior Fifth Army leaders who went to the region. "There is no lack of effort or desire from our Soldiers who have taken on a tough mission. Everyone can

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feel proud of what they are doing to assist those who were affected," Nieves said. "There is still plenty of work and coordination that needs to be accomplished, and you can be assured our Soldiers are right in the middle performing outstandingly."

Fifth U.S. Army troops are among the nearly 65,000 military members providing hurricane relief support by land, air and sea. Active duty, National Guardsmen and Reservists from all branches of the military have flown rescue and resupply missions, rendered medical aide, secured areas, and provided bases to house evacuees. Nearly 19,200 active duty members and 45,420 Army and Air National Guard members are supporting the efforts.

(Maj. Sheila Campbell and Margaret Broadbent, of Fifth Army Public Affairs, also contributed to this story.)